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Follow-Up on the News

Fugitive Drama With a Twist

ERNEST R. KEISER, whose smooth talk helped the Government lure a notorious fugitive back to this country for trial, became a fugitive himself a little over a year ago.

It was he, the Government said, who in 1982 helped induce Edwin P. Wilson, the former intelligence agent wanted for illegal shipment of arms, to return from Libya. Mr. Wilson is now in prison, serving more than 50 years for that and other offenses.

The 64-year-old Mr. Keiser had just been convicted in White Plains of larceny in January 1985 and was scheduled to be tried in Federal District Court in Tampa, Fla., on fraud charges when he fled with his wife, Bahira. She herself faced Federal charges of false testimony in Tampa.

The Keisers are in Munich, and Mr. Keiser at least appears safe from prosecution at this time.

West Germany claims him as a citizen and declines to extradite him, says Michael L. Rubinstein, an assistant United States attorney in Tampa. This country is still trying, however, to extradite Mrs. Keiser, whose "nationality is questionable," Mr. Rubinstein says.

Meanwhile, the prosecutor notes, three people have been tried in Federal Court in Tampa on charges of helping Mr. Keiser to escape. The jury acquitted one, failed to reach a verdict on another and found the third defendant, Daniel Drake — described by Mr. Rubinstein as "Keiser's long-time associate" — guilty of obstructing justice. He is to be sentenced March 17.

Mr. Keiser's escape had some of the trappings of suspense fiction. He

"conned" somebody into giving him his passport," disguised himself with a wig to look like that person and left the country "with about \$80,000 in cash that he conned from another innocent person," Mr. Rubinstein says.

The fugitive flew from Baltimore to Detroit, drove to Windsor, Ontario, then flew to Toronto and on to Europe, the prosecutor says.